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15 March 1961

REVISED CUBAN OPERATION

1. Political Requirements: The plan for a Cuban operation and the variants thereof presented on 11 March were considered to be politically objectionable on the ground that the contemplated operation would not have the appearance of an infiltration of guerrillas in support of an internal revolution but rather that of a small-scale World War II type of amphibious assault. In undertaking to develop alternative plans and to judge their political acceptability, it has been necessary to infer from the comments made on the earlier plan the characteristics which a new plan should possess in order to be politically acceptable. They would appear to be the following:

a. An Unspectacular Landing: The initial landing should be as unspectacular as possible and should have neither immediately prior nor concurrent tactical air support. It should conform as closely as possible to the typical pattern of the landings of small groups intended to establish themselves or to join others in terrain suited for guerrilla operations. In the absence of air support and in order to fit the pattern, it should probably be at night.

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b. A Base for Tactical Air Operations: It was emphasized that ultimate success of the operation will require tactical air operations leading to the establishment of the control of the air over Cuba. In order to fit the pattern of revolution, these operations should be conducted from an air base within territory held by opposition forces. Since it is impracticable to undertake construction of an air base in the rainy season and before any air support is available, the territory seized in the original landing must include an air strip that can support tactical operations.

c. Slower Tempo: The operation should be so designed that there could be an appreciable period of build up after the initial landing before major offensive action was undertaken. This would allow for a minimum decent interval between the establishment and the recognition by the U.S. of a provisional government and would fit more closely the pattern of a typical revolution.

d. Guerrilla Warfare Alternative: Ideally, the terrain should not only be protected by geography against prompt or well-supported attack from land but also suitable for guerrilla warfare in the event that an organized perimeter could not be held.

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2. Alternative Areas: Five different areas, three of them on the mainland of Cuba and two on islands off the coast, were studied carefully to determine whether they would permit an operation fitting the above conditions. One of the areas appears to be eminently suited for the operation. All the others had to be rejected either because of unfavorable geography (notably the absence of a suitable air strip) or heavy concentrations of enemy forces, or both. The area selected is located at the head of a well protected deep water estuary on the south coast of Cuba. It is almost surrounded by swamps impenetrable to infantry in any numbers and entirely impenetrable to vehicles, except along two narrow and easily defended approaches. Although strategically isolated by these terrain features, the area is near the center of the island and the presence of an opposition force there will soon become known to the entire population of Cuba and constitute a serious threat to the regime. The beachhead area contains one and possibly two air strips adequate to handle B-26's. There are several good landing beaches. It is of interest that this area has been the scene of resistance activities and of outright guerrilla warfare for over a hundred years.

3. Phases of the Operation:

a. The operation will begin with a night landing. There are no known enemy forces (even police) in the objective area and it is anticipated that the landing can be carried out with few if any casualties

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and with no serious combat. As many supplies as possible will be unloaded over the beaches but the ships will put to sea in time to be well offshore by dawn. The whole beachhead area including the air strips will be immediately occupied and approach routes defended. No tanks will be brought ashore in the initial landing. It is believed that this operation can be accomplished quite unobtrusively and that the Castro regime will have little idea of the size of the force involved.

b. The second phase, preferably commencing at dawn following the landing, will involve the movement into the beachhead of tactical aircraft and their prompt commitment for strikes against the Castro Air Force. Concurrently C-46's will move in with gas in drums, minimal maintenance equipment, and maintenance personnel. As rapidly as possible, the whole tactical air operation will be based in the beachhead but initially only enough aircraft will be based there plausibly to account for all observable activity over the island.

c. In the third phase, as soon as there is adequate protection for shipping from enemy air attack, ships will move back into the beach to discharge supplies and equipment (including tanks). It must be

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presumed that counter attacks against the beachhead will be undertaken within 24 to 48 hours of the landing but the perimeter can easily be held against attacks along the most direct approach routes. The terrain may well prevent any sizeable attacks (providing the enemy air force has been rendered ineffective) until the opposition force is ready to attempt to break out of the beachhead.

d. The timing and direction of such offensive action will depend upon the course of events in the island. At least three directions of break out are possible. Because of the canalization of the approaches to the beachhead from the interior, a break out will require close support by tactical air to be successful unless enemy forces are thoroughly disorganized. The opposition force will have the option, however, of undertaking an amphibious assault with tactical air support against a different objective area if it should seem desirable.

4. Political Action: The beachhead area proposed to be occupied is both large enough and safe enough so that it should be entirely feasible to install the provisional government there as soon as aircraft can land safely. Once installed, the tempo of the operation will permit the U.S. Government

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to extend recognition after a decent interval and thus to prepare the way for more open and more extensive logistical support if this should be necessary.

5. Military Advantages:

a. This is a safer military operation than the daylight landing in force originally proposed. The landing itself is more likely to be unopposed or very lightly opposed and the beachhead perimeter could be more easily held.

b. There are no known communications facilities in the immediate target area. This circumstance, coupled with the plan for a night landing, increases the chance of achieving surprise.

c. By comparison with any of the known inaccessible parts of the Oriente Province the objective area is closer to rear bases for air and sea logistical support.

d. The plan has the disadvantage that the build up of force can be only gradual since there is virtually no local population from which to recruit additional troops and volunteers from other parts of Cuba will be able to infiltrate into the area only gradually.

6. Political Acceptability: The proposal here outlined fits the three conditions stated in paragraph 1 above for the political acceptability of a paramilitary operation. The landing is unspectacular; no tactical air support will be provided until an air base of sorts is active within the beachhead area;

the tempo of the operation is as desired; and the terrain is such as to minimize the risk of defeat and maximize the options open to the opposition force.

a. It may be objected that the undertaking of tactical air operations so promptly after the landing is inconsistent with the pattern of a revolution. But most Latin American revolutions in recent years have used aircraft and it is only natural that they would be used in this case as soon as the opposition had secured control of an air strip. Wherever in the island a paramilitary operation is attempted and whatever its tempo, command of the air will sooner or later have to be established, and aircraft will have to be flown into a beachhead to enable this to be done. Sooner or later, then, it is bound to be revealed that the opposition in Cuba has friends outside who are able and willing to supply it with obsolescent combat aircraft. This revelation will be neither surprising nor out of keeping with traditional practice.

b. An alternative way to handle this problem would be to make a few strafing runs against the Castro Air Force some days before the landing and apparently as an opposition act unrelated to any other military moves.

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7. Conclusion: The operation here outlined, despite the revision of concept to meet the political requirements stated above, will still have a political cost. The study over the past several months of many possible paramilitary operations makes perfectly clear, however, that it is impossible to introduce into Cuba and commit to action military resources that will have a good chance of setting in motion the overthrow of the regime without paying some price in terms of accusations by the Communists and possible criticism by others. It is believed that the plan here outlined goes as far as possible in the direction of minimizing the political cost without impairing its soundness and chance of success as a military operation. The alternative would appear to be the demobilization of the paramilitary force and the return of its members to the United States. It is, of course, well understood that this course of action too involves certain risks.